

# PROPHET

(PEACE BE UPON HIM)

بُعِثْتُ مُعَلِّمًا

*A teacher to mankind*

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***In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful***

هُوَ الَّذِي بَعَثَ فِي الْأُمِّيِّينَ رَسُولًا مِّنْهُمْ يَتْلُو  
عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَإِنْ كَانُوا  
مِن قَبْلُ لَفِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ

It is He Who has sent amongst the Unlettered an apostle from among themselves, to rehearse to them His Signs, to sanctify them, and to instruct them in Scripture and Wisdom,- although they had been, before, in manifest error.

(Al-Quran Surah Al-Jumaa, verse - 2)

A vast corpus of individual narratives, consisting of supposed eye-witness accounts of Muhammad's every act, his orders, prohibitions, recommendations, approval or disapproval, covers every conceivable aspect of personal, private, domestic, public, political, commercial, military, fiscal and administrative, as well as strictly religious, activity undertaken hour by hour, day by day, week in, week out, year after year of the twenty three years of his public ministry. All that he had ever been seen to do, or heard to say, or reply when questioned had, it was claimed, been reported by one or other of his inner circle and immediately taken up, talked about, analysed, checked, stored, memorised and preserved and then handed on to any who had been absent by those who had been present to see, here and record.

The Prophet as Teacher' does not need justification, since all prophets are meant to be teachers in the first instance, and the Qur'an itself has talked the function of the Prophet Muhammad as "*To teach them the book and wisdom and making them grow in purity.*"

He was a born teacher, endowed with pleasant appearance. He was of medium size, with a bright face and pleasant voice-which is commented on frequently in the *hadith*- and it was said to carry further than those of other people. He was meticulous about maintaining his clean, tidy appearance and pleasant fragrance. He was highly sociable man. He used to smile more than anybody else at his Companions, and would sometimes even laugh until you could see his back teeth. He showed more interest than others in what they said, as he mingled among them. If anyone was sitting with him or negotiating with him on any matter, he would give anyone sitting around him a share of his attention, and each one of them would believe that no one else was getting more of his attention than himself. He respected the sensitive of everybody, as once Prophet was sitting in a gathering with a young boy on his right and the elders on his left. A bowl of milk was presented to the Prophet. He sipped some, and then, in respect to the rule of passing dish to the person on the right, which conflicted in this situation with respect for the elders on the left, he asked the boy: 'would you allow me to give it first to the elders?' He replied: 'No, I won't give up my opportunity to drink after you to anyone.' Here the Prophet exemplifies respect for the rules of etiquette, and for the young boy as well as for the elders. In another example: 'Don't-you are meant to be bearers of good news, not to frighten people. Could you not pour a bucket of water over it?'

The Prophet was very approachable, showing interest in what people said before him, or in what they asked him about. They would interrupt him in the pulpit and ask questions, upon which he would answer and praise them for asking the question. Frequently, we find teaching taking place in an intimate situation, Mu'adh tells us: 'I was riding behind the Prophet on a donkey called *'Afir*. The Prophet asked me: "Do you know what God's rights are over his servants?"...' Intimacy here is witnessed also in the Prophet's naming of the donkey, showing his respect for the donkey's individual character, as he did with his camel, and teaching his Companion by asking his question, so as to involve him from the beginning and to make him think.

The Prophet would get students attention by eye contact, by facing them, or occasionally touching them. Ibn Mas'ud tells us: 'And then he put his hand on my shoulder and said...' or: 'He was teaching me the *tashahhud* while holding both my hands and looking into my eyes, making me repeat after and correcting my mistakes.'

Touching also gave emphasis and was used to encourage the students. He once asked a Companion a question, and when he gave a good answer, the man said: 'He thumped me in the chest and said: "Well done, how excellent your knowledge is, Abu Mund'hir (God be pleased with him)!"' He was sparing in what he said and would teach only a little at a time, so as not to overload them with information. A'ishah said: 'The Prophet was not a chatterbox like you. Anyone could count the words he uttered.' This actually conforms with the standard of Arab nobility, where a man of dignity and status would speak only very little, but would say wise things when he does. That is why his sermons were also very short- indeed he taught his Companions that they too should make short sermons. In fact, sometimes we find some posing a long question, to which the Prophet answer only; 'Yes':

Tell me', a man asked, 'if I perform the obligatory prayer, pay the alms due, fast in Ramadan and perform the Hajj but do nothing further, would I enter Paradise?' The Prophet said; 'yes.'

He resisted those who were over-zealous in asking questions, saying, for instance:

Allah almighty has set obligations observe them. He has ordained some prohibitions, avoid them; He kept silent many matters, out of mercy, not out of forgetfulness: do not keep asking about them.

This teacher knew when to introduce new material, and when not to, as one Companion said: 'He would select only suitable moments to teach us.' We know that he instructed his Companions to make things easy, rather than hard. When he sent a Companion to teach a community for away, he said: 'First call on them to believe in one God. If they believe in that, then call on them to do the obligatory prayer, and if they obey you in doing that, then call on them to give the alms-due—'

Most of the hadith consist of answering questions or correcting mistakes. The first group is evident in the numerous questions addressed to the Prophet. The other group is announced normally by such expressions as: *laysa.. walakin..* 'not so... but', or *innama..* 'rather'. For example: 'Faith is not a matter of wishing, but what is firmly rooted in the heart and proved by action. When the Prophet heard that a man had emigrated to *Madinah* only to marry a woman called Umm Qa'ys, he said: 'Acts are judged only according to their intention. He who emigrates for the sake of God and His Messenger, his emigration will be for God and His Messenger, and he who emigrates for worldly gain, or to marry some women, his emigration will be for that.'

The man became known as *Muhajir* Umm Qa'ys. The Arabic formulation of this hadith is truly remarkable-concise, rhythmic, repeating an important and telling phrase in the reward of good intention, and avoiding repetition in the reward of bad intention, to indicate that it is worthless. This spontaneous comment on the situation by the Prophet is highly regarded for its excellence as an example of *jawami' al-kallim*. It should also be mentioned that it is easier to remember a hadith if it is in response to a question that has been raised, or a comment on an erroneous situation. Here we have a memory aid, which those who discuss authenticity should bear in mind. Many situations were so spontaneous and memorable, and were witnessed by so many people, that it would be unreasonable to claim that they were forgotten or fabricated.

The Prophet's statements were also marked by two characteristics: spontaneity and brevity. Hadith material was relevant to real life situation, and was not revelation imparted on one occasion, like the Ten Commandments, for instance. The teachings took place over twenty years, making them all the more effective and memorable; they were not a long list to be learned by rote, but practical knowledge arising out of the community itself. Spontaneity and brevity mark all the genres we have in the *hadith*: the answers to question, the sermons, the stories, the expert at getting and keeping the attention of his audience. The Qur'an has already told us: When the Qur'an is recited; listen to it attentively, so that you may be given mercy.

The Prophet said: 'Of you say to your neighbour, in the mosque during the Friday sermon, so much as "Listen" or "Keep quite", you would have made a vain utterance which would spoil your floor would be considered unacceptably noisy.'

He said: May God brighten the face of anyone who listens to what I say, takes it in , and then passes it on to others.

He trained his Companions to know that it was their duty to listen, to understand and pass on the information, which made them keener to get it right and remember it. It should be remembered that these were people who had allays relied on their memories to retain their literature, history and genealogy. Sceptical Western scholars do not seem to bear in mind the extent to which people in a different culture can retain information by heart. Yet Muslim society, people take this for granted as part of their daily, especially when the information is short, and given over a long period by such an important teacher as this. The Prophet was also aware of people's sensitivity. When he needed to correct an individual in an embarrassing situation, he would give an impersonal instruction, rather than

embarrassing the individual. He would use man. - 'Whoever has done so and so should.' or 'Why do some people do such and such?.'

### **Arousing Interest: Interactive Methods**

A frequent technique employed by the Prophet was to ask people question, so as to make them think and produce information themselves, upon which he would comment on the answer. He once asked: 'Do you know who is a bankrupt?' to which they said: 'Someone who has no *dirham* or *dinar*?' He said: 'No, the real bankrupt is the one who comes on the Day of Judgement having collected many good deeds, but having also hit or insulted someone. Some of his good deeds will have to be given to the one he hit in compensation, and some to the one he insulted, etc. until very quickly nothing is left for him. In many hadiths he asks: 'Do you know..' to which his Companions would answer: 'God and His Messenger know best.' Thus he keeps them in suspense, waiting for an answer. His questing technique was also very effective: When a man came to declare his Islam, but asked him for permission to continue committing adultery, some of the Companions were quick to curse the man. The Prophet said: 'Bring him here', made him sit in front of him and asked: 'Would you like such a thing to happen to your mother?' He said: No may I ransom you by my own father and mother!' 'Nor do other people like it to happen to their mothers. Would you like it to happen to your sister?' and so on, until the man came to accept that he should not commit adultery, and the Prophet then made a special prayers for him.

The Prophet does not simply pour material out at his listeners. He engages them, arousing their interest and expectations. This is witnessed particularly in the numerous *hadith* that begin with *ala, ala, adulluk, alal wa'llimuk* (Shall I tell you? Shall I teach you? Shall I inform you?). In instances of a special statement which the recipient should take exactly, the Prophet would use: *qul, quli* (say) Ibn Mas'ud tells us that the Prophet was teaching him a formula and asking him to repeat it, and that at one point he commented: 'This is not what I said exactly.' Sometimes the Prophet is seen to check on the learning of his Companions, as Ibn Mas'ud confirms: 'The Prophet asked me to read the *Qur'an* to him.' I said: 'how can I read it to you when it was revealed to you.' And he said: 'I like to hear it from others.' The use of suspense to force the learner to seek information was also a suitable technique for some learners:

A man came and performed the prayer while he Prophet was in the mosque. The Prophet told him: 'Go back and pray, you have not prayed', and after the second time he said: 'Go back and pray, you have not prayed', and so on, until the man said to him: 'I really do not know any better. Please teach me.' Then the Prophet began to teach him how to do it properly, taking him through all the actions of prayer.

A similarly interactive teaching method can be seen in the following *hadith*: He said: 'I swear by God he is not a believer; then he was silent. The people asked: 'who is that?' and he answered: 'The person whose neighbour does not feel safe from his harm.' Sometimes a Companion might a lively dialogue. One asked the Prophet:

'What do you think if a man comes wanting to take away my money.' Don't give it to him.' 'What if he fights me?' Fight him.' 'What if he kills me?' You will be a martyr.' 'What if I kill him?' He will be in Hell.'

A man came and told the Prophet: 'I have been ruined!' 'What happened?' 'I fell upon my wife during the daytime fasting in Ramadan.' Can you free a slave to atone for that?' No.' 'Can you fast two successive months?' No' 'Can you feed 60 poor people?' 'No.' so the Prophet stopped at that and the man sat idly by. Meanwhile, someone else came and presented a sack of dates to the Prophet as a gift. He said: "Where is the man who was asking? And gave the sack to him saying: 'Go and feed this to the poor in atonement.' The man said: Poor! I swear by Him who sent thee with the truth, there is none in the whole city poor than myself and my family.' So the Prophet roared with laughter and said: 'Very well, go and feed your family.'

## Aids to Memory: Listing, Repetition, Structure of Material, Gestures, Visual Stimuli

The Prophet was adept at using to memory, so as to make things clear. One device was to structure the material in a few numbered points; either three or five are common. For instance: Islam was built on five (pillars). Three things will make a man a through hypocrite: when he speaks he lies, when he promises, he breaks his promises, and when he is trusted, he breaks his trust.

Frequently, we find a grand total is given for emphasis. Forcing the material into specific numbers in such a way makes the listener eager to get the right number. Thus you may sometimes find a Companion reporting: ‘... and I have forgotten the third.’ By comparing his version to those of others, a full list can be obtained. Sometimes, before listing the item, the Prophet would pause, to arouse curiosity: There are three persons God will not speak to on the day of Judgement: (and he repeated this statement three times and paused). Abu Dh’arr asked: ‘they are lost and ruined indeed! Who are they, Prophet of God?’

A similar logical structuring of material is found in general statements followed by illustrations, such as: ‘each of you is a shepherd, and will be responsible for his charges: the man is a Shepard in his house,’ he then continues with ‘the woman, the child, the servant...’ He then repeats the general statement at the end.

Gesturing was also a common practice of the Prophet, as when he said: ‘Real piety is HERE’ (-pointing to his chest). ‘Restrain THIS’ (-touching his own tongue). While reporting how the Prophet told the story of a mother who was separated from her baby and when reunited she immediately put him to her breast and he began sucking, the narrator said: ‘I can visualise the Prophet sucking the trip of his finger.’ The Prophet also told of an earlier prophet, who was beaten by people and they injured his head, so that blood ran down his face. Again the narrator said: ‘I can still visualise the Prophet wiping his own face.’

It should also be noted that the question and answer technique, and the suspense it involves, was an aid to memory: ‘What day is this?’ he asked. ‘Friday,’ they answered. ‘What month is this?’ *Dhul Hijjah*. ‘What place is this?’ The sanctuary’. Then you should know that your blood, your money, your honour, is as inviolable to you as they are in this day, this month and this place.’ Here he used the technique even in a sermon. Other devices to aid memory included brevity of statement; formulating material on the same order and pattern as a *Qur’anic* verses; rhythmic statements (which is very common); explanation of cause’ and contrast, as in: ‘the upper hand is better than the lower one’ (in giving), Body language was also used to give particular emphasis to important points: Reclining, he asked: ‘Shall I tell you of the greatest sins?’ After mentioning the first two he sat up, and said: ‘and indeed: giving false testimony, giving false testimony, giving false testimony.’ And the narrator said: ‘He went on saying this until we began to say: “When will he stop?”’

The Prophet saw a crowd of women and children coming back from a wedding celebration. So he stood up to his full height and said: ‘By God! You are amongst the dearest to my heart!’ repeating this three times.

He looked at the full moon and said to his Companions: ‘you will see your Lord as clearly as you see this. So if you can some prayer before sunrise or before sunset, don’t miss opportunity.’ This also demonstrates the Prophet’s skill in arousing incentives to learn and do-good deeds, rather than asking for an action to be done.

A man asked: ‘Tell me something which if do it, I will enter Paradise.’ The Prophet told him to worship God alone, do the prayer, and pay the *zakah* and fast in *Ramdan*. The man said: ‘I swear by God, I will not do any more than that.’ The Prophet commented: ‘If it pleases any of you to look at a man who will be one of the inhabitants of Paradise, he should look at this man.’

Ibn Masud also reported that the Prophet once drew a diagram on the sand to illustrate that man cannot escape death and the many accidents that befall him in his life: that is , if he escapes one he will be caught by another.

### **Literary Devices:**

The Prophet used simple, clear language- he hated obfuscation. One of the highly appreciated qualities of *hadith* material in Arabic is *jawami al-kallim*, that is, concise, all embracing statements: A man asked the Prophet: 'Tell me something about Islam which I can ask of no one but you.' He answered: 'Say, "I believe in God", and thereafter be upright.' When a man asked him how to perform the rites of 'Umrah he replied: Do as you do on *Hajj*.' Once he said to his companions 'Leave what makes you doubt for that which does not make you doubt.' And also it is reported that he said 'If you feel no shame, then do as you wish.'

In many *hadiths* the Prophet surprises the listener with the unexpected poses a paradox: the portion given away in charity decreases No money.' On one occasion they killed a sheep and began to give it away in charity. He asked 'A'isha: 'how much is left? She said: 'It has all gone except the shoulder.' He replied: 'No, it all remains except the shoulder.'

'Fasting people will enter Paradise through the gate of *Al-Rayyan* (the one whose thirst has been quenched).' In the *hadith*, powerful images are expressive, and impress themselves on the memory: 'Let no one fall on his wife as a male donkey falls on a she-donkey; send a messenger first.' They asked what messenger, he said: 'A kiss.' When one of you gives charity-and God only accepts what is good-God receives it in his right hand and rears it as one of you rears his young foal, until it becomes as big as a mountain.'

'Two hungry wolves set loose in a flock of sheep would not wreak more havoc than a man's excessive eagerness to amass wealth and status harms his religious practice.'

### **Balanced and comprehensive statements:**

'Relieve the distressed; feed the hungry, visit the sick.' When a man was cut and bled, the Prophet taught that someone should wet their finger, place it in the earth, and apply it the wound to stop the bleeding, saying: 'The earth of our land, with the saliva of one of our company, heals our sick, by leave of our Lord. 'The tooth-stick cleans the mouth and pleases the Lord.'

Emphasis is also a common feature of *hadith* language. This is achieved through oaths such as: 'By Him who holds my soul in His hands!' Intensity is also expressed by using such empathic particle as: *inna*, *add*, *ladad*, *alal* and *halla*. Stories and parables are also used extensively, and have been treated separately in Arabic in the past and present.